

MADAGASCAR RARITIES TOUR

Sicklebill Safaris 2015

A very different ambitious and challenging tour, which came about for two reasons, one being Phil wanting to go see Madagascar Pochard and Fossa, and the second being David F. and Simon wanting Helmet Vanga; thus it became feasible to devise an itinerary around most of the major rarity sites including some highly desirable mammals. Tsingy Wood Rail was not accessible at this time, but we included everything else that is not on the regular tour schedules, and divided the tour into sections to meet various time and physical constraints.

The weather was decidedly unhelpful, 2015 was a bad El Niño year and we certainly encountered a fair amount of rain, though luckily nothing bad enough to derail us. Air Madagascar was the other great variable, but we actually did quite well and had just a single flight cancelled, from Diego Suarez to Tana, which we were able to work around satisfactorily.

Phil went characteristically off-piste just before the tour began, learning of a new site for Aye-aye, so instead of R & R in Tana post Field Guides tour, he diverted down to the Pangalanes about 3 hours from Andasibe and had fantastic looks at 3 of this iconic creature, a great start.

Meeting up with Simon and David B. we then packed into the 4WD on Dec 7 and set off to drive some 680 km up-country to Antsohihy, where my dictum of “*when in Madagascar it’s always further than you expect and takes longer than you want*” certainly held true. Still, the road was actually pretty good, driver Geri was very competent, the Land Rover Defender functioned well and we even found *Chez Mamie* at about 2000 for very good fish and chips before retiring to the nice *Bellevue Hotel* at Antsohihy.

Next day Dec 8 was the most challenging of the trip- we got to Bealanana on indifferent roads by lunch time, but then hit a huge storm cell just as we got to the steep and slippery clay section, with massive ruts and a big drop off to the side. This

basically stalled us for 3 hours, torrential rain made things impossible but we amazingly got rescued by a fellow on a motorbike, who stopped early on in the proceedings and then went and borrowed a spade and set to work leveling off and smoothing out, despite the rain torrents. Eventually, and very slowly, Geri got the truck down the slope without bogging it or tipping over, and we learned that our rescuer was actually the local mayor, showing typical Malagasy kindness to strangers in need.

There was still 35 km to go, and this took a further 5 hours, with many chances for mayhem en route, with deep ruts, steep slopes, holes, dodgy bridges etc. A loose group of at least 5 **Eleonora's falcons** some 20 km out was a good find as the truck was negotiating a very steep drop down. We eventually got to the Peregrine Fund area around 2100, having taken 8 hours to traverse the 45 km on the worst road I have ever travelled- anything worse would be undrivable!

We then saw lights coming across a river, and the Peregrine fund guys told us it would be best to camp at their site, where I was thrilled to find a large empty hut and 3 foam rubber mattresses- yee ha! Given the wet we conditions we encountered this was a godsend and we crashed out exhausted by the day.

Dec 9 dawned cloudy but dry, and we drove some 20 minutes to Lake Bemaniveka where we quickly got scope views of **Madagascar Pochard**, a pair with 3 juvs., then went down to the lakeside and mounted a somewhat rickety platform where we sat and got very good views of 4 adult pochards. Next we walked to a marshy crater opposite and went down to try for **Slender-billed Flufftail**, sadly without success though I may have heard it just once- no response to much tape playing, and **Madagascar Flufftails** quite vocal, I wonder if it was too wet at this time for this rare species? **Madagascar Harrier** was nice anyway, with a fine male here and a female nearby.

We then drove about 15 minutes to another small crater lake whose name I never got, and then walked down a steep slope to get to the lovely forest, flushing 2 **Common Quail** en route. It began

to rain and by the time we had got across the tree trunk bridge and into the forest it was pouring. We then walked for about 30 minutes before the guides stopped by a big fig with large holes in the trunk, a roost site for **Madagascar Red Owl**. Gerard could discern a shape in the darkness, but it was so wet and we were so steamed up I could see nothing, and I just managed to avert the guides knocking on the trunk to flush it- I was really worried it would shoot out and vanish without us seeing it! Happily we did get ourselves set up, and a gentle tap on the trunk saw the bird shoot out but happily land just close by, for fantastic views and some decent shots despite the dire conditions. It sat out for about 10 minutes, then went back inside, a great tick of a very difficult species.

We also saw the nest site of the female, which had two chicks, sadly all predated by a Madagascar Harrier-Hawk about 2 weeks prior. It was high in a cleft in a huge *Ficus*, and the Peregrine Fund had an observation platform nearby. We had actually heard what I presume to be this owl on the walk in last night, when a rather deep toned *Tyto* gave a short wheezy call in dense forest not long after we started to climb upwards, but thankfully the local guides knew of this site. One near the pochards had moved recently so there was some worry about whether or not there was an accessible owl, so glad we got lucky. Heavy rain all afternoon and night, but did see **White-throated Rail** adult with big juv. foraging around the camp, and also a great view of **Madagascar Buttonquail** when a female with 2 presumed big juveniles walked right by the steps to the hut!

Coming out next day Dec 10 in advance of more heavy rain was uneventful, we had 4 guys from the camp along, coming out for some R & R after 3 months there, apparently they will walk back after their days off. Good to have some helpers along but it was fairly dry lower down and so much easier, we got back in under 5 hours and did lunch in Bealanana before heading back to Antosohihy and an excellent lobster dinner at the Bellevue Hotel, phase one complete.

Dec 11 saw us drive north to Antsiranana/Diego Suarez, on quite good roads but still basically taking all day, we got to the very nice *Nature Lodge* at Joffreville near Amber Mt by late pm. Next day Dec 12 the rain curse struck again, but not before we had great looks at **Amber Mt Rock Thrush** by the camping ground, where a pair had a nest with 3 big juveniles in a cleft in a tree right by the car park. There is just no way this is Forest Rock Thrush, I don't care what the genetics supposedly say, it is just so different. A bad view of **Sanford's Brown Lemur** and no sign of Crowned Lemur was disappointing, and the night walk we did was hampered by low cloud so the Amber Mt Fork-marked Lemur did not show, though we did see **Amber Mt Mouse Lemur** and several new chameleons, plus I got a good tape of the odd dialect of **Madagascar Scops Owl** here.

Dec 13 saw Mad Air cancel our flight to Tana, so we did another morning at the park but again in bad weather, so no sign of the local *fulvescens* race of Spectacled Tetraka. Went down to Diego and the Colbert Hotel late pm ready for a potential early flight out tomorrow Dec 14, which eventually left at 1000. We did have some luck though as it connected with a flight back to Mahajunga and Gerard somehow got our bags moved across so the tight connection worked. I must digress here with the saga of the croque monsieur from the Soavista café at Ivato Airport- now the one from the Elabola Restaurant upstairs is really good, but this takeaway version was an abomination, it came in as the equal worst meal of the trip- a fried egg had broken all over the box, the ham was bloody zebu, mine had human hair in it, it was just totally disgusting and I feel sick just recalling it. We got the steward to dispose of it in some haste. Landing at Mahajunga we repaired to the very nice *Edena Kely* hotel, which we use on the main tours, and prepared for the Lake Kinkony trip next day.

Dec 15- early boat crossing over the Betsiboka estuary, and met up with Geri and the Land Rover again ready for the drive south to Mitsinjo. Heavy rain had churned up the road so it was rough and rutted but still drivable, and we made the town and

picked up the Asity guide by lunchtime. Another dire meal followed here, with *Mme Zaza's hotely* being remarkable for the quantity of flies, the inedible rice and chicken and bony albeit tasty fish tails. Ah well, we then crossed by ferry and got to the campsite at Lake Kinkony within 2 hours on a quite reasonable road, so it all took about 6 hours and was actually quite bearable. The site had shelters for the tents, which was nice, plus functional shower and toilets, so we were well set up and went out on a pirogue with 3 paddlers around 1630 in quest of **Sakalava Rail**.

Now I had always wondered why something that looks quite like Black Crake is so range restricted, and now I know why- the habitat is the weird bamboo-like *Phragmites mauritianus* that grows in dense stands and clumps and is quite unlike any other marsh I've seen, so this bird is a habitat specialist. The guys paddled for some 45 minutes with no sign, then the guy at the front peered into a gap in the reeds and began pointing. We were too far back to see, so he then stood up, stripped off and went over the side, before pulling the boat into the reeds so we could get a view of Sakalava Rail. This was the first time I have been shown a life bird by a naked black man, there is probably a market for this kind of thing! Anyway, the bird was actually by a nest with 2 buffy brown dark marked eggs, not that we saw that as that would have meant wading, but the Asity guide did go over and got a photo of it, and we got cracking views of the anxious rail nearby, albeit the only one of the day. **Madagascar Sacred Ibis** also flew over so the guys got two ticks on this trip.

Back to camp and a very long wait for what was eventually a very nice evening meal, a shame I ran out of my Reunion spiced rum so quickly. 0200 saw a storm come over with David and I getting a tad damp as the tent entrances faced the direction of the squall, but it soon ended and we got back to sleep.

Dec 16—early morning boat trip on Lake Kinkony 0530-0830, in good conditions, and some 4 **Sakalava Rails** seen, with two singles and an adult with a well grown juvenile. The supporting cast was also good with **African Openbill**, **African Spoonbill**,

Lesser Flamingo, Little Bittern and Humblot's Heron plus another 5 **Madagascar Sacred Ibis**. Back to camp, packed up and headed back into Mitsinjo, seeing some very fine **Mongoose Lemur** and **Decken's Sifaka** in the dry forest on the way back.

Uneventful drive back up to Katsepy, with dark storm clouds all around, and night at *Mme Chabaud's Lodge*, much nicer than camping- you can't cross the estuary after 1600, it seems they have had lots of accidents in the late afternoon poor weather here so it is now not allowed, but this hotel was fine and a great pick-up point for the boat trip next day.

Dec 17 - Good weather, good calm sea, good boat with a shade cover, pick-up 0930 as planned but then no damn Bernier's (Madagascar) Teal on some 3 hours out there, with **Yellow-billed Stork** and **Madagascar Sacred Ibis** the highlights. Oh well, we tried. Good lunch *Chez Karon*, then a quick and fruitless foray out to the newly cleared of vegetation sacred lake near the airport that used to be good for ducks before Air Mad more or less on time back to Tana where we met up with Brylie de Albuquerque and David Fisher.

Dec 18 Naturally an early morning departure from Tana, going via Tolagnaro/Fort Dauphin to Morondava and arriving at lunch time, with a good seafood lunch at *Les Bougainvilliers* then a drive out to the famous Avenue of Baobabs, a great site and with 4 **Sooty Falcons** haunting them. The road was in good shape, newly fixed as far the baobabs and not bad thereafter, so we did the 60 km to Kirindy Forest camp in a couple of hours. Seeing **Narrow-striped Mongoose** on the drive in was great, and we had not long been settled into our simple cabins when a **Fossa** was discovered, and we spent some while admiring this strange and wonderful creature, my main reason for setting up this part of the tour. It was hanging around near the garbage dump, and spent a lot of time sleeping and resting, they are quite easy to see here in Oct/Nov mating season, but become hard thereafter so we were right at the tail end of the window of opportunity. We also saw it that night crossing by the dining room, then had great looks next day when it

was laid out by cabin 9 then showed very nicely again that evening by the camp, devouring a chicken carcass by the kitchen!

The night walk was around 1900-2030, with guide Happy being excellent- despite incipient rain he came up with **Mme Berthe's** and **Grey Mouse Lemur**, a **Pale Fork-marked Lemur**, **Red-tailed Sportive-Lemur** and **Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur**, plus a nice look at **Torotoroka Scops Owl** and a huge female **Dumerel's Ground-Boa**. It was a memorable walk in this odd dry forest/spiny forest amalgam.

Dec 19 Birding around Kirindy with **White-breasted Mesite** and **Grey-headed Lovebird** the star of the morning, with the afternoon walk cut short and the night walk aborted due to heavy rain again, though we did make a foray along the main track. Massive termite hatch in the cabins belonging to David B. and I, but great looks at **Giant Jumping Rat** at 2230. I offered the guide a bonus for this and it worked.

Dec 20 morning walk with great looks at **Red-fronted Brown Lemur** and **Verreaux's Sifakas**, and a fabulous collection of bright yellow frogs singing loudly at a relict pool in the dry sandy river, and being predated by giant hog-nosed snakes, an amazing sight. Back to Morondava with a bonus of **African Pygmy-goose** and **Madagascar Grebe** at a small lake en route, and then the Davids and I went out with Gerard to the Baobab Avenue for late pm, stopping at a small marsh some 13 km out from Morondava on the way back, where **African Swamphen**, **Allen's Gallinule**, the only **Madagascar Pond Heron** of the tour and a **Painted Snipe** were a pleasing find. I also think we heard **Baillon's Crake** here (and en route to Bemaniveka on Dec 8), having referred to some South African recordings when I got home.

Meanwhile back in Morondava a heavy storm had flooded the top rooms at the *Baobab Hotel*, this had been quite a trip for rainy conditions one way and another.

Dec 21 The Davids and I went and looked at some shorebirds at the Morondava estuary that morning, then got the Mad Air

Flight back to Tana on time at 1700, landing in dry conditions in the last of the daylight but encountering one of the usual Tana late storms en route back to the Carlton. I departed at 0300 next day for Jo'burg, David B had the day in Tana before his flight next morning, and Simon, Brylie and David F. left for Maroantsetra and Masoala early next day too. Happily they all saw the main objective the **Helmet Vanga** nicely, and Simon and Brylie's very tight schedule **Aye-aye** twitch also worked out.

My thanks to everyone for good company and the chance to put this amazing trip together, I managed 4 lifers plus 3 Madagascar ticks, and got 8 new lemurs and 4 other new mammals, plus 4 new chameleons and at least one snake. Let's do some more somewhere. Particular thanks to Theo and Gerard for such great organization of complex logistics and for dealing for Air Mad. and generally much hard work to make the trip function. Also thanks to the various local guides and the drivers who did so well, and to the Peregrine Fund guys who were so helpful.

Itinerary

Field Guide tour ended at St Denis, Reunion on Dec 2.

Thursday Dec 3 Fly St Denis, Reunion to Tana on Air Austral arriving 1400, o/n *Carlton Hotel*

Friday Dec 4 Tana to Brickaville via Feon' Ny Ala for lunch, c.170 km, then Pangalanes canal system, some 5 hours to the boat from Tana. One hour for boat transfer then 10 minutes to transfer at 1800 to the Aye-aye sanctuary

Sat Dec 5 Pangalanes to Tana 4.5 hours after the boat transfer, o/n *Carlton Hotel*.

Day 1-Sun- 06 Dec

Carlton Hotel Tana awaiting arrival of Dave on Air France and delayed Simon (14 hour hold-up in Nairobi with Kenya Airways)

Paris-Antananarivo Arrival at Ivato airport early hours Dec 7 and transfer to *Carlton Hotel*

Day 2-Mon 7 Dec Tana-Antsohihy (680 km about 8 hours drive on quite reasonable tar roads), departed about 0730. Drive northward to Antsohihy, lunch at local restaurant, Dinner and night at *Bellevue Hotel*

Day 3 -Tues 8 Dec Antsohihy-Bealanana-Bemaniveka (115 km+40 km)

15 km on RN 6 and then the rest is on a degraded road to Bealanana where we did lunch before the hard part, the last 40 km. a 5 hours drive if all goes well- it didn't, raining in torrents just as we got to the steep and very slippery inaugural section, which cost us a 3-hour delay as it was negotiated, and we eventually arrived around 9 pm. Accommodation camping for 2 nights, thankfully using the Peregrine Fund hut.

Day 4 Wed 9 Dec **Bemaniveka Lake** then wet swampland crater adjacent before drive to a second lake and walk into forest there. Heavy rain late morning, all afternoon and early evening.

Day 5-Thurs 10 Dec Bemaniveka-Bealanana-Antsohihy (40km+115km)

0700-1200 Drive back to Antsohihy, road much drier so much easier but still diabolical, took about 5 hours. Lunch at Bealanana. Dinner was a superb lobster dish, and night at *Bellevue Hotel*

Day 6-Fri 11 DEC Antsohihy-Diego Suarez-Mont D'Ambre 390 km 0730-1700, road only bad for last 2 hours. O/n *Nature Lodge*, Joffreville.

Day 7 Sat 12 Dec **Montagne D'Ambre NP** 0800-1200, rain from mid-morning on. Afternoon at Nature Lodge, then night walk along park entrance road. O/n *Nature Lodge*.

Day 8 Sun Dec 13 Air Mad cancelled the Tana flight, so morning at **Montagne D'Ambre NP** in the rain, afternoon down to Diego Suarez and *Le Colbert Hotel*, courtesy of Air Mad. which hotel was actually fine and with good wifi.

Day 9 Mon Dec 14 Depart hotel 0530 for airport at Diego Suarez, then eventually get checked in and hang about till 1000 when the flight actually left. Reached Tana at mid-day, just time to catch the flight to Mahajunga, with our bags being miraculously transferred across. Incredibly awful croque monsieur from the downstairs takeaway there at Ivato, totally vomit inducing. Arrived Mahajunga at 1415 and went to *Edena Kely Hotel*.

Day 10 Tues Dec 15 0630 boat crossing over Betsiboka estuary and meet Gerry and the vehicle for the drive to Mitsinjo then to **Lac Kinkony** via a car ferry. Rough road and wet initially, but nothing like as bad as Bemaniveka and perfectly negotiable in the Land Rover Defender, taking about 4 hours to Mitsinjo where we had an awful lunch at *Hotely Zaza*, then 2 hours to the campsite at the lake, arriving mid-afternoon. made a boat trip out around 4 pm for 2 hours. Camped overnight using the shelters of the Asity Fund, but got somewhat damp around 0200 when a storm blew through.

Day 11 Wed Dec 16 0530 boat trip for 3 hours on **Lake Kinkony**, then packed up and went back to Mahatsinjo, then north to Katsepy, o/n *Madame Chabaud's Lodge*.

Day 12 Thurs Dec 17 **Betsiboka boat trip** 0930-1200, nice boat with a sunshade, good falling tide and calm sea but no damn Bernier's Teal showing. Lunch *Chez Karon*, quick foray to ponds near airstrip was not productive, and then flight back to Tana and o/n *Carlton Hotel* where we met up with Brylie De Albuquerque and David Fisher for the next leg of the tour.

Day 13 Fri Dec 18 Tana to Morondava via Tolagnaro, arriving around lunchtime and having lunch at the Bougainvilliere Restaurant on the seafront before heading out to Kirindy via the famous and spectacular Allée des Baobabs. **Kirindy** is about 60 km out and now on a quite good dirt road, it took less than 2 hours to do the whole thing. Night walk 1900-2030 in light rain. O/n *Kirindy camp chalets*.

Day 14 Sat Dec 19 **Kirindy Forest** morning and afternoon birding, curtailed night walk to main track due to a heavy storm coming in. Massive termite hatch in the rooms at Kirindy for David B and Phil, and rodents gnawing in the roof, so not a good night for some.

Day 15 Sun Dec 20 Morning walk at Kirindy, then back to Morondava and lunch at *Baobab Hotel*. The Davids and Phil went out to the Allée des Baobabs and some birding at a roadside wetland 13 km out from Morondava, and came back as another big storm hit, flooding some of the upstairs rooms at the hotel with DF having to change rooms and dry out his clothing.

Day 16 Mon Dec 21 Morning at Morondava, the Davids and Phil going to the **Morondava estuary** 10 min walk from the hotel for a couple of hours after the rain had ceased. Air Mad MD 701 to Tana on time at 1700, checked in at *Carlton* around 1930 in heavy rain, but landed in the dry!

Day 17 Tues Dec 22 Phil left *Carlton* 0300 for connection to Jo'burg at 0600, DF, Simon and Brylie to Maroantsetra with Gerard for the Masoala section on 0630 flight, DB at *Carlton* till Air France flight to Paris early next day. Some hassles with Air Mad in checking 2 bags, had to pay US\$70 excess despite being within my weight limit, and their payment office didn't open until nearly 0500, all very silly. They also only open 2 hours before the

flight, and we got there in 25 min from the Carlton at that time in the morning so I had a half hour to kill.

Arrived Jo'burg 0800 after 3 hour flight, and was amazingly allowed into the shopping concourse and restaurant facilities despite not yet having a boarding card, commendably efficient from SA Airports, you just register and go back later to get your boarding card when the check-in opens. Good for business, good PR and good customer satisfaction, Australia could learn here.

Species List

* Denotes heard only (I) Introduced

Bold type denotes a species endemic to Madagascar

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

WHITE-FACED WHISTLING-DUCK (*Dendrocygna viduata*)

10 on the lake near the Red Owl site, then up to 20 at Lake Kinkony and the marsh en route to Katsepy.

[FULVOUS WHISTLING DUCK *Dendrocygna bicolor*]

Two probables at Lac Kinkony Dec 16 were in very bad light, so left uncertain.

MELLER'S DUCK (*Anas melleri*)

A major Simon want fulfilled, we saw a pair with 3 juvs at Lac Bemaniveka Dec 9, and about 40 in total that day at the two lakes, quacking loudly at the second crater lake, a missed tape op!

RED-BILLED DUCK (*Anas erythrorhyncha*)

10 on the lake near the Red Owl site.

AFRICAN PYGMY-GOOSE (*Nettapus auritus*)

Two pairs on a small pond as we came out of Kirindy Forest, a very good year tick for me as we missed them on the FG trip and at Mahajunga. I almost certainly saw one shoot by on Lac Kinkony too, but too quick to be certain.

MADAGASCAR POCHARD (*Aythya innotata*)

A pair with 3 juvs on Lac Bemaniveka Dec 9, and another male and female seen when we go down to the lake shore, good views once we got up on the platform but in very harsh light. Not seen on the other lake and just these 4 adults were all we saw, though seemingly the 4 lakes in this area hold some 68 birds (Peregrine Fund rep). There are around 60 in captivity at Antsohihy and they breed well, with plans to reintroduce to some of the lakes in the north. Be good to get some outside Madagascar too as an insurance.....

Phasianidae (Quail etc.)

COMMON QUAIL (*Coturnix coturnix*)

I heard it at the Peregrine Fund camp grasslands Dec 9, and we flushed one as we came out to go to the pochard lake, then two en route to the Red Owl, with another in the camp grasslands next day.

Phoenicopteridae (Flamingoes)

LESSER FLAMINGO (*Phoeniconaias minor*)

One flying over at Lake Kinkony Dec 16, with another flamingo sp. later that may have been a Greater.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

MADAGASCAR GREBE (*Tachybaptus pelzelni*)

About 40 on Lac Bemaniveka and half a dozen on the lake near the Red Owl site Dec 9. Then, unexpectedly, 2 were on the small pond as we came out of Kirindy on Dec 20.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

LONG-TAILED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax africanus pictilis*)

Two at the marsh as we came from Bealanana to Amber Mt, then 5 at Lac Kinkony Dec 15 and up to 10 on Dec 16.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

LITTLE BITTERN (*Ixobrychus minutus podiceps*)

6 of this endemic race seen on the morning boat trip, including a couple of males. A Madagascar tick for Phil. David B. saw a couple at the marsh near Morondava Dec 20 as well.

Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea firsasa*)

Just a single on the Betsiboka estuary, amazingly scarce.

HUMBLLOT'S HERON (*Ardea humbloti*)

A single flew close by at Lac Kinkony Dec 16, a rather rare bird.

PURPLE HERON (*Ardea purpurea madagascariensis*)

One at the marsh en route from Antsohihy to Diego Suarez Dec 11 and one at Lac Kinkony Dec 15.

GREAT EGRET (AFRICAN) (*Ardea alba melanorhynchos*)

Small numbers at most wetlands, some 7-day records at eight sites.

DIMORPHIC EGRET (*Egretta (garzetta) dimorpha*)

Quite distinct from Little Egret, being dimorphic, sometimes having pale legs and a far longer heavier bill. White birds seemed much commoner, but both morphs were widespread in small numbers.

BLACK HERON (*Egretta ardesiaca*)

Uncommon, 3 at the marsh en route from Antsohihy to Diego Suarez Dec 11, then 20 at Lake Kinkony with 5 there next day, before 2 at the sacred lake at Maroantsetra.

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis ibis*)

Small numbers were widespread, this is the Western taxon, split by the IOC.

SQUACCO HERON (*Ardeola ralloides*)

2 at the marsh en route from Antsohihy to Diego Suarez Dec 11, then 12 at Lake Kinkony, and about 20 at the small marsh near Morondava Dec 20.

MADAGASCAR POND-HERON (*Ardeola idae*)

A single at the roadside marsh 13 km out from Morondava on Dec 20 was the only sighting.

STRIATED HERON (*Butorides striata rutenbergi*)

8 at Lake Kinkony and 4 at the roadside marsh near Morondava.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)
4 at Lac Kinkony Dec 16 and 2 at the Morondava roadside marsh.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*)

30 at Antogomena Bevary, the wetland between Katsepy and Matsinjo and 12 at Lake Kinkony Dec 15, with 80 there next day.

MADAGASCAR SACRED IBIS (*Threskiornis (a.) bernieri*)

One at Lac Kinkony Dec 15 and 4 singles on Dec 16, then 5 on the Betsiboka estuary Dec 17.

MADAGASCAR CRESTED IBIS (*Lophotibis cristata*)

A single flew up from off the approach road at Amber Mt NP Dec 12. One was on a nest high in a baobab *Adansonia rubrostipa* at Kirindy Dec 20. We also saw *Adansonia za* here, and *A. grandidieri* at the Avenue of Baobabs, with *A. suarezensis* near Antsirana on a tsingy escarpment there.

AFRICAN SPOONBILL (*Platalea alba*)

3 flew over at Lake Kinkony on Dec 16, a species I had only seen once before in this country, at Lac Alarobia.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

MADAGASCAR HARRIER (*Circus maillardi*)

A male well north of Tana in the bare uplands on Dec 7, then a fine male and female at Lac Bemaniveka marsh Dec 9, with others seen nearby by Dave and Simon.

YELLOW-BILLED KITE (*Milvus (migrans) parasitus*)

Widespread but very local with very small numbers seen. Yellow-billed Kite was split by the South Africans decades back and most other authorities are now adopting this treatment.

MADAGASCAR HARRIER-HAWK (*Polyboroides madagascariensis*)

One fine adult soaring high over the mangroves at Betsiboka Dec 17.

FRANCES'S SPARROWHAWK (*Accipiter francesiae*)

Two males seen at Kirindy, sitting up quite well.

MADAGASCAR BUZZARD (*Buteo brachypterus*)
Seen at Bemaniveka, Kinkony and Kirindy.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

* **MADAGASCAR RAIL** (*Rallus madagascariensis*)

We heard it close by the platform at Lac Bemaniveka but they stayed hidden in the reeds.

WHITE-THROATED RAIL (*Dryolimnas cuvieri cuvieri*)

Great looks at the Peregrine Fund camp where an adult and a well-grown youngster were coming in to the kitchen area. Pic on IBC. Then a fine adult at Lac Kinkony Dec 16.

* **BAILLON'S CRAKE** (*Zapornia pusilla*)

I think we heard this in marshy ground below where the car was stuck en route to Bemaniveka, and again at the marsh near Morondava. I found a recording from South Africa which sounds like the typical crake rattle we heard. This is a new Madagascar bid for me and also an African list addition, but now I need to see one!

ALLEN'S GALLINULE (*Porphyrio alleni*)

One adult in the small marsh by the road 13 km from Morondava Dec 20, a good year tick.

AFRICAN SWAMPHEN (*Porphyrio madagascariensis*)

One adult in the small marsh by the road 13 km from Morondava Dec 20, unexpected and only my second Madagascar sighting.

EURASIAN MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus pyrrhorhoa*)

An adult in the small marsh by the road 13 km from Morondava Dec 20

Sarothruridae (Flufftails)

* **MADAGASCAR FLUFFTAIL** (*Sarothrura insularis*)

Heard en route to Bemaniveka and also at the marshy crater by the pochard lake where it is sympatric with Slender-billed Flufftail.

Ciconiidae (Storks)

YELLOW-BILLED STORK (*Mycteria ibis*)

Two adults on the Betsiboka estuary, presumed to be two birds as

one was some way from the other. Rare in Madagascar and a new species here for me in November.

AFRICAN OPENBILL (*Anastomus lamelligerus madagascariensis*)
4 at Lake Kinkony on Dec 16, a rare bird in Madagascar which I have only seen at Lac Ravelobe previously.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

WHITE-FRONTED SAND PLOVER (*Charadrius marginatus*)

About a dozen at the estuary at Morondava Dec 21.

GREATER SAND PLOVER (*Charadrius leschenaultii*)

About 60 on the Betsiboka estuary Dec 16 where it was the commonest shorebird. Then about a dozen at Morondava Dec 21.

COMMON RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

4 at the Betsiboka estuary Dec 16 and 3 at Morondava Dec 21.

THREE-BANDED PLOVER (*Charadrius tricollaris bifrontatus*)

A single at the marsh en route to Amber Mt Dec 11, then one by the roadside at Mahajunga Dec 15. This taxon is rather different to African birds, with a greyish not white forehead, and it is split by the latest HBW/BirdLife review as Madagascar Three-banded Plover *C. bifrontatus*. Note the Sinclair guide depicts the African race.....

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

TEREK SANDPIPER (*Xenus cinereus*)

10 on the Betsiboka estuary and 4 at Morondava Dec 21.

COMMON SANDPIPER (*Actitis hypoleucos*)

One at the marsh N of Antoshihy en route to Diego Suarez, one at Kirindy and a couple again at the Morondava estuary.

2 at Hotel Baobab Dec 20 and 2 at Morondava estuary Dec 21

COMMON GREENSHANK (*Tringa nebularia*)

Heard at Lac Kinkony and about 5 at Morondava Dec 21.

CURLEW SANDPIPER (*Calidris ferrugineus*)

5 on the Betsiboka estuary Dec 16 and about 150 at Morondava Dec 21.

WHIMBREL (EUROPEAN) (*Numenius phaeopus phaeopus*)
15 on the Betsiboka estuary and about 5 at Morondava Dec 21.

Glareolidae (Pratincoles and Coursers)

MADAGASCAR PRATINCOLE (*Glareola ocularis*)
3 on Dec 11 calling noisily at the marsh en route to Amber Mt.

Turnicidae (Buttonquail)

MADAGASCAR BUTTONQUAIL (*Turnix nigricollis*)
Fantastic views of a female and 2 accompanying birds that walked right by the doorway at the Peregrine Fund camp on Dec 9, a good pick up for David B. Then we saw 3 in the roads en route to Amber Mt and a brilliant female close by at Kirindy.

Laridae (Gulls and terns)

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*)
At least one was at Lake Kinkony on Dec 16, one of my very few Madagascar records.

SAUNDERS'S TERN (*Sternula saundersi*)
One at the Morondava estuary Dec 21, presumably this species by range.

LESSER CRESTED TERN (*Thalasseus bengalensis*)
60 on the Betsiboka estuary.

GREATER CRESTED TERN (*Thalasseus bergii*)
One at Katsepy.

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*)
One at Morondava Dec 18 and about 60 on Dec 21.

WHISKERED TERN (*Chlidonias hybrida*)
2 at Lake Kinkony on Dec 16 were my first in Madagascar, where it seems very scarce.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) (I)
Small numbers in the towns.

MADAGASCAR TURTLE-DOVE (*Streptopelia picturata picturata*)

Small numbers, the most being 10 daily at Lake Kinkony.

NAMAQUA DOVE (*Oena capensis aliena*)

Small numbers in the drier country, most around Lake Kinkony.

MADAGASCAR GREEN PIGEON (*Treron australis*)

David saw a single at Lake Kinkony, and another at Kirindy; they would be the western race *xenius*.

Mesitornithidae (Mesites)

WHITE-BREASTED MESITE (*Mesitornis variegatus*)

Two seen very nicely at Kirindy on Dec 19, and David B. saw two the day before, whilst I heard them the same day.

Centropodidae (Coucals and couas)

COQUEREL'S COUA (*Coua coquereli*)

Two singles seen well at Kirindy, it is like a smaller version of Giant Coua with that rather reddish chest.

CRESTED COUA (*Coua cristata*)

Seen well at Kirindy with up to 3 in a day, of the pale-vented race *dumonti*.

GIANT COUA (*Coua gigas*)

One seen at Kirindy, and heard each day there.

MADAGASCAR COUCAL (*Centropus toulou*)

Heard most days and small numbers seen.

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

MADAGASCAR CUCKOO (*Cuculus rochii*)

Heard most days and 1 was seen near Bealanana as we were stuck Dec 8, with another later that day.

Tytonidae (Barn-Owls)

WESTERN BARN OWL (*Tyto alba hypermetra*)

I saw one from the car as we travelled towards Antsohihy around 8 pm on Dec 8, and David saw at least one other. The whole

complex is being broken up so this is now Western Barn Owl, distinct from both North American and Australian birds. This taxon *hypermetra* is endemic to Madagascar and the Comoros.

RED OWL (*Tyto soumagnei*)

Perhaps bird of the trip for me, with a great sighting in the forest at Bemaniveka, seemingly the male bird. Appalling conditions, but we got really good looks and some decent photos.

AFRICAN MARSH OWL (*Asio capensis*)

David B. saw one at Ivato airport as we came back late from Mahajunga, it pays to be the last one off the plane as Simon and I dipped.

Strigidae (Owls)

* **MALAGASY SCOPS-OWL** (*Otus rutilus*)

Heard at Nature Lodge, Joffreville and 2+ were calling on the night walk, dialect slightly different here with an extra note at the end.

TOROTOROKA SCOPS OWL (*Otus madagascariensis*)

One calling well and seen nicely on the night walk at Kirindy Dec 18; what was presumably another calling at the camp next evening was giving just a single piping hoot rather like that of Eurasian Scops Owl, but sadly I missed taping it at 0200; it also gave a wheezy rattled series once. Bizarrely Sinclair & Langrand fail to split this despite splitting just about everything else, despite the very different vocalizations which are such a key indicator in this genus. The new Hawkins & Safford field guide is also very conservative here.

Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)

* **MADAGASCAR NIGHTJAR** (*Caprimulgus madagascariensis*)

Heard at Nature Lodge, Joffreville.

Apodidae (Swifts)

MALAGASY SPINETAIL (*Zoonavena grandidieri*)

David B. Saw one at Amber Mt. Nature Lodge, I got an unlistable view of it and almost certainly saw one at Kirindy as well.

AFRICAN PALM-SWIFT (MADAGASCAR) (*Cypsiurus parvus gracilis*)

Just a few en route to Antsohihy and then at Kirindy.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

MALAGASY KINGFISHER (*Corythornis vintsioides*)

One at the marsh en route from Antsohihy to Diego Suarez Dec 11, and one was seen at Amber Mt near the campground waterfall. Then great views of one by the frog pond at Kirindy and several more in the Morondava area.

MADAGASCAR PYGMY-KINGFISHER (*Corythornis madagascariensis*)

One attending the nest hole in an earth bank at Montagne D'Ambre Park HQ Dec12.

Meropidae (Bee-eaters)

MADAGASCAR (OLIVE) BEE-EATER (*Merops superciliosus*)

Widespread in small numbers.

Coraciidae (Rollers)

BROAD-BILLED ROLLER (MADAGASCAR) (*Eurystomus glaucurus glaucurus*)

Widespread in small numbers, and very vocal.

Leptosomidae (Cuckoo-Roller)

CUCKOO-ROLLER (*Leptosomus discolor*)

That evocative call is one of the great sounds of the less dry Madagascan forests, we saw one male Dec 11 and Dec 12 flying over at the Nature Lodge at Amber Mt. Heard at Kirindy too. An endemic family, and one of the most ancient of all bird lineages.

Upupidae (Hoopoes)

MADAGASCAR HOOPOE (*Upupa marginata*)

Two great birds by my cabin at the Nature Lodge at Amber Mt. Dec 11. Then seen again at Kirindy. The call is quite distinct to those of the other hoopoes.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

MADAGASCAR KESTREL (*Falco newtoni*)

Very few, a couple of sightings as we headed north, then it was seen at the Baobab Alley and a single at Ivato Airport.

ELEONORA'S FALCON (*Falco eleonora*)

5+ birds in a loose flock as we headed for Lake Bemaniveka Dec 8, and a single as we came back on Dec 10. Heavy moult was evident in the ragged flight feathers. Also a single at Amber Mt at the Nature Lodge on Dec 11 and 12.

SOOTY FALCON (*Falco concolor*)

4 birds at the Baobab Alley gave great looks and were in heavy moult, then we had 4 at Ivato Airport late pm on Dec 21, the first I had seen here this year despite quite a few visits since early November.

Psitttrichasidae (Vasa and NG Vulturine Parrots)

LESSER VASA PARROT (*Coracopsis niger*)

Noisy and seen a few times at Lake Bemaniveka and then at Kirindy,

Psittacidae (Parrots)

GREY-HEADED LOVEBIRD (*Agapornis cana*)

5 at Lake Kinkony, and then good views of a pair at Kirindy.

Vangidae (Vangas, Helmetshrikes, and Allies)

COMMON NEWTONIA (*Newtonia brunneicauda*)

The clicking call was a typical sound of the forests at Lac Bemaniveka and Amber Mt and we saw small numbers at Kirindy.

DARK NEWTONIA (*Newtonia amphichroa*)

Simon saw this at Amber Mt.

TYLAS VANGA (*Tylas eduardi*)

One seen and another heard in the forest at Lac Bemaniveka Dec 9. Sadly no sign of the rare western taxon *albigularis* at Kirindy, one I was particularly interested in from here.

BLUE VANGA (*Cyanolanius madagascarinus*)

Good views of 3 each day at Kirindy.

RED-TAILED VANGA (*Calicalicus madagascariensis*)

Heard at Amber Mt NP and seen very nicely at Kirindy Dec 19, also heard there next day, it seems scarce here.

CHABERT VANGA (*Leptopterus chabert*)

3 at Nature Lodge Dec 12 and one at the park HQ, then one at Kirindy.

HOOK-BILLED VANGA (*Vanga curvirostris*)

One at Amber Mt NP Dec 12, David B. saw it in forest near Kinkony, and we had a single calling nicely at Kirindy.

RUFOUS VANGA (*Schetba rufa*)

A pair with 2 young at Kirindy Dec 20.

SICKLE-BILLED VANGA (*Falculea palliata*)

2 in the forest reserve as we were coming out from Lake Kinkony.

WHITE-HEADED VANGA (*Artamella viridis*)

One in the mangroves at Betsiboka, and one at Kirindy Dec 20.

Campephagidae (*Cuckooshrikes*)

MADAGASCAR (ASHY) CUCKOOSHRIKE (*Coracina cinerea*)

One at Amber Mt NP Dec 12 and Dave saw 2 at Nature Lodge. Then a pair at Kirindy, with the amazingly pale juvenile sat on the building roof. This bird was white below with black spots on the chest and an altogether very puzzling creature indeed, though fortunately both the parents and the old nest were nearby so we were able to puzzle it out.

Dicruridae (*Drongos*)

CRESTED DRONGO (*Dicrurus forficatus*)

Widespread in small numbers in all the forest regions, also out in the marsh at Lake Kinkony.

Monarchidae (Monarch Flycatchers)

MADAGASCAR PARADISE-FLYCATCHER (*Terpsiphone mutata*)

Simon saw one at Amber Mt NP then quite common at Kirindy with white morph males as well as several females.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

PIED CROW (*Corvus albus*)

Seen in small numbers on most days in the drier areas.

Alaudidae (Larks)

MADAGASCAR LARK (*Mirafra hova*)

Common in the grasslands around Bemaniveka, I think this will soon go to a new genus as it is seemingly a sister group to *Eremopterix* sparrowlarks, a counter-intuitive finding if ever there was one.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

MASCARENE MARTIN (*Phedina borbonica madagascariensis*)

Small numbers around Bemaniveka.

Pycnonotidae (Bulbuls)

MADAGASCAR BULBUL (*Hypsipetes madagascariensis*) –

Quite common in the Madagascan forests, a large untidy looking bird with dark cap and red bill.

Bernieridae (tetrakas etc.)

LONG-BILLED TETRAKA (*Bernieria madagascariensis*)

Great looks at 5 at Kirindy on Dec 20, I think this is *inceleber* the western and southern taxon, which is a likely split from the nominate of the E and N, as Pale Tetraaka.

Acrocephalidae (Reed-Warblers and Allies)

MADAGASCAR BRUSH-WARBLER (*Nesillas typica*)

Seen at the Bemaniveka camp and heard daily in the north.

MADAGASCAR SWAMP-WARBLER (*Acrocephalus newtoni*)
Great looks at Lake Kinkony.

Cisticolidae (Cisticolas and Allies)

COMMON JERY (*Neomixis tenella*)

Vocal and common at Kirindy, but not easy to see well.

* **STRIPE-THROATED JERY** (*Neomixis striatigula*)

Heard at Bemaniveka.

MADAGASCAR CISTICOLA (*Cisticola cherina*)

Widespread, with the “zip” call often heard, and seen well at Bemaniveka and near Morondava.

Zosteropidae (White-eyes, Yuhinas, and Allies)

MADAGASCAR WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops maderaspatanus*)

Seen daily in the first part of the tour in the wetter forests, but none in the west.

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

MADAGASCAR MAGPIE-ROBIN (*Copsychus albospecularis*)

The taxonomy of this species is complicated, essentially I think we saw the race *pica* throughout as this is the one with the big white wing bars, white outer tail feathers and white belly. The new Hawkins and Safford guide gives the nominate for the NE but this has a black belly so I presume ours at Bemaniveka and Amber Mt were not this taxon. The birds in the SE are *inexpectatus* but we did not get into that range this tour. These last two races sound like a split in waiting.

AMBER MOUNTAIN ROCK THRUSH (*Monticola (sharpei) erythronotos*)

Great looks at a pair at the camp ground at Amber Mt. Dec 12, with a large mossy cup nest wedged in a large hole in a tree trunk about 2 m off the ground, with 3 voracious juveniles begging and gaping. Also two females seen in the forest on the walk by Cascade Antakarana Dec 12. The male is a beautiful powder blue

with bright orange red underparts and brown back, quite distinct to other Madagascan taxa, We saw them again next day too in the heavy rain. I can't accept this is the same species as Forest Rock-Thrush as it is so distinctive. Pics posted to IBC.

MADAGASCAR STONECHAT (*Saxicola (torquatus) sibilla sibilla*)

Widespread in small numbers, this group is being split out and the IOC now separate them as Madagascar Stonechat, with more to come! We saw them en route to and from the Pochard site, and again at Nature Lodge, Joffreville.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

COMMON MYNA (*Acridotheres tristis*) (I)

Common invasive in the dry areas

Nectariniidae (Sunbirds and Spiderhunters)

SOUIMANGA SUNBIRD (*Cinnyris souimanga*)

Small numbers in the wooded areas, and very vocal.

MADAGASCAR GREEN SUNBIRD (*Cinnyris notatus*)

Just a pair seen well in the thorn bush reserve near Katsepy, and then one briefly at Kirindy.

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

MADAGASCAR WAGTAIL (*Motacilla flaviventris*)

Seen at Bemaniveka and around Lake Kinkony, max 2 birds.

Passeridae Sparrows and allies

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) (I)

Unexpected sightings were of at least 5 at the *Hotel Colbert* in Antsirana Dec 14 then a male and 2 females at *Chez Karon Mahajunga* Dec 17. Both may be new sites for this species which is very local in Madagascar, I had only seen it at Tamatave previously.

Ploceidae (Weavers and Allies)

NELICOURVI WEAVER (*Ploceus nelicourvi*)

A couple of males at Amber Mt., they make a solitary nest amazingly like that of a malimbe, with long pendulous spouts. A striking bird, pix now posted to IBC.

SAKALAVA WEAVER (*Ploceus sakalava*)

Good views en route to the Pochard site, and at Nature Lodge, Amber Mt. Also quite common at Kirindy. They nest colonially in villages like regular weavers, not solitarily like the Nelicourvi.

RED FODY (*Foudia madagascariensis*)

Widespread in small numbers

Estrildidae (Waxbills and Allies)

MADAGASCAR MUNIA (*Lepidopygia (Lemuresthes) nana*)

Now placed in a monotypic genus *Lepidopygia (Lemuresthes)*, and sometimes called Madagascar Bibfinch, as it is not congeneric with the *Lonchura* munias/mannikins. Small numbers and good views were had at Lac Bemaniveka and Amber Mt., and I posted a pic to the IBC.

MAMMALS

Tenrecidae

LOWLAND STREAKED TENREC (*Hemicentetes semispinosus*)

Great views of two singles at Lac Bemaniveka, this is one extraordinary creature.

Daubentoniidae (Aye-aye)

AYE-AYE (*Daubentonia madagascariensis*)

Incredible views of 2 males and female on Dec 3 in the Pangalanes at the feeding station they now have open there, I just had time to fit this in before the trip began and it was extraordinary, a mammal I never thought I'd see. Simon and Brylie were also successful after Masoala after their desperate late night twitch!

Cheirogaleidae

AMBER MOUNTAIN MOUSE-LEMUR (*Microcebus arnholdi*)

Our guide Philip showed us two of this diminutive lemur on the night walk above the Nature Lodge; it is really tiny, one of the smallest primates, with blackish around the eyes and nose, with rich orange-brown upperparts and white below.

GREY MOUSE-LEMUR (*Microcebus rufogriseus*)

Three seen well on the night walk at Kirindy on Dec 18.

MADAME BERTHE'S MOUSE-LEMUR (*Microcebus berthae*)

A single of this amazingly tiny creature was sat in a fork on a trunk on the night walk at Kirindy on Dec 18, it had very large ears, dark patches around the eyes, white underparts and an orangey-brown pelage, the world's smallest primate and one I had particularly hoped for here.

Lemuridae

SANFORD'S BROWN LEMUR (*Eulemur sanfordi*)

We got brief looks at small group in dense forest at Amber Mt. really only seeing one clearly and all too briefly, they seem very wary here. A new species for us all, endemic to quite a small area.

Sadly it was a misty night and there was no sign of Amber Mt Fork-marked Lemur, which is often noisy and visible here, and the very wet late mornings kind of mucked up any chance of Crowned Lemur at the park itself.

RED-FRONTED BROWN LEMUR (*Eulemur rufofrontatus*)

Great looks at Kirindy where they were quite confiding.

MONGOOSE LEMUR (*Eulemur mongoz*)

A nice find when we stopped for the Decken's Sifakas as we came out from Kinkony, with a group of 4 of these uncommon lemurs.

DECKEN'S SIFAKA (*Propithecus deckenii*)

Geri spotted these as we were coming out from Lake Kinkony, and we got great looks at 4 animals including a female with a baby. A new species for me.

VERREAUX'S SIFAKA (*Propithecus verreauxi*)

Great looks at Kirindy where they were also quite confiding. We also saw the beautiful **Coquerel's Sifakas** (*Propithecus coquereli*) at Edena Kely in Mahjunga, where a feral troupe lives. They were amazingly polite and well-behaved, sitting on the restaurant beams as we ate and accepting baguettes when offered them, in preference to mangoes strangely enough.

PALE FORK-MARKED LEMUR (*Phaner pallescens*)

Our guide Happy found one high in large tree on the night walk at Kirindy on Dec 18, but only David B and I got onto it before it hid itself; another I was anxious to get this here as we missed the Amber Mt version and *Phaner* was one of the two remaining lemur genera I had not seen. It had grey pelage, white underparts, a dark tail and thick black stripes down the face and along the back. One of 5 species of nocturnal lemur we saw on this walk, despite far from ideal conditions in intermittent light rain.

RED-TAILED SPORTIVE-LEMUR (*Lepilemur ruficaudatus*)

One on the night walk at Kirindy and one in daylight there next day. This was a new species for us all, but this genus seems to have proliferated on the most minor characters.

WESTERN FAT-TAILED DWARF LEMUR (*Cheirogalus medius*)

Seen on both our nocturnal forays at Kirindy, with nice looks at single animals, another new species for us all.

Eupleridae (Malagasy carnivores)

FOSSA (*Cryptoferox procta*)

The highlight of the Kirindy trip was seeing a superb male Fossa so well on four separate occasions in the vicinity of the camp, in both daytime and at night. It reminded me very much of a small cougar with short legs and a very long tail, quite a formidable looking creature for which the locals show considerable respect!

NARROW-STRIPED MONGOOSE (*Mungotictis decimlineata*)

3 of these were on the track as we drove into Kirindy, one with much better defined narrow dark flank stripes than the others, and we saw another later nearer the camp. They belong to the subfamily *Galidiinae* and are a distinctive ancient Malagasy radiation not close to regular mongoose. It is quite range-restricted and pretty rare, I think Kirindy is the place to see it.

Muridae (Rats and mice)

WESTERN TUFT-TAILED RAT (*Eliurus myoxinus*)

A star of the night walk, this endearing creature gave great looks as it sat across a tree trunk for ages just above head height, the long tail with the toilet brush tip was quite striking. I saw one of this genus at Ranomafana on the earlier trip, but nothing like as well as this one.

GIANT JUMPING-RAT (*Hypogeomys antimena*)

My other big reason for coming to Kirindy was to try and see this rare and strange creature, which we missed on the first night. Happily around 2230 on Dec 19 Gerard came to get us to come see 2 of them on the main track just south of the camp. They reminded me of Bilbies, sitting upright, hopping and with very large ears and blunt snout, about rabbit-sized too. A rare species and we were lucky to get them.

BLACK RAT (*Rattus rattus*) (I)

A rat we saw several times in the dining area is presumably this introduced species.

Herps

Brookesia tuberculata- this is the second smallest of the chameleons and Philip showed us one at the camp ground at Amber Mt. A new species for me.

Chameleo pardalis Panther chameleon- Common at Amber Mt, we saw 7 on the night walk and another at the lodge in the daytime.

Calumma boettgeri Blue-nosed chameleon- 2 seen on the night walk, it is a small yellowish one with a blunt bluish nose horn. A new species for me also.

Calumma amber A split from Short-horned (*C. brevicornis*), we saw one at Amber Mt. campground, another new species for me.

Furcifer petteri Petter's chameleon- three males and a female of this bright green smallish chameleon were seen on the night walk, the males having a double horn and the female lacking one. I got 4 new species of chameleon today!

Furcifer labordi Labord's chameleon was the small green nose-horned chameleon new for us all at Kirindy on the wet night walk, when we saw 2 individuals. It is apparently the most short-lived of all 4-legged vertebrates, living just 3 or 4 months! Yet another lifer chameleon.

Furcifer oustaleti Oustalet's chameleon- a couple at Kirindy included one nice big one on Dec 20.

Phelsuma ?madagascariensis the vivid green geckoes at the Nature Lodge at Amber Mt. are about 12 cm long and the largest *Phelsumas* I have seen, one had red spots on the back, another had a red facial stripe and one had a red blob on the nose but was otherwise unmarked.

Phelsuma lineata

Lasiodactylus sakalava-one of the geckos from Kirindy.

Oplurus cuvieri Collared Iguana –widespread in the west, especially at Kirindy and Kinkony.

Zonosaurus laticaudatus- Kirindy, the big stripy one

Zonosaurus kersteni- the smaller more spotted one at Kirindy

Mabuya elegans- seen at Kirindy.

Leioheterodon madagascariensis Giant Hog-nosed Snake- several spectacular large one seen at Kirindy including two hunting the golden frogs.

Leioheterodon modestus- the large pinkish snake we saw on the way into Kirindy.

Madagascarophis colubrinus- this was the slender patterned one with the small head at the puddles by the dining area at Kirindy.

Acrontophis dumereli Dumerel's ground-boa-a very large big-headed almost python-like female was by the track on the night walk.

Golden yellow frogs *Aglyptodactylus ?laticeps*- dozens in two small remnant ponds in the dry riverbed were a beautiful spectacle, mating with the brown females and singing loudly- I will post this cut on Soundcloud.

Phil Gregory, Kuranda Dec 2015

www.sicklebillsafaris.com

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